

Handout Negation  
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Egg Summer School Brno  
August 7, 2007

(Some) contexts where NPIs are licensed:

Negation

- (1) She didn't say **anything**.  
She didn't say that Paul had said **anything**.  
She didn't say that Mary claimed that Paul had said **anything**.  
They didn't hire a linguist who knew **anything** about semantics.

*Without*

- (2) She found the place without **any** problem.

*doubt*

- (3) I doubt that he knew **anything** about this plan.

*neither...nor*

- (4) Neither John nor Mary knew anything.

Non-focused part of *only* sentences

- (5) I only ever eat meat WHEN I'M DEPRESSED. (CAPS=focus)

Questions

- (6) Have you heard **anything** from them **yet**?

What do all these licensors have in common? It certainly doesn't seem to be their syntactic category. And calling them + affective without defining affective independently of NPI licensing (Klima 1964) does not seem helpful. Ladusaw (1979) argues that it is a semantic property--the fact that they create downward entailing contexts.

Consider the following pattern, replacing 'Q' with *no*, *some* and *every*, respectively:

- (7) a. [Q tourists who have **ever** been to Paris] liked it.  
 b. [Q tourists who have been to Paris] **ever** bought **any** souvenirs there.

(NB: [Q restriction] scope)

What we get is this:

(8)		Restriction	Scope
	No	NPI ok	NPI ok
	Some	NPI *	NPI *
	Every	NPI ok	NPI *

*No* shows that the licensing of NPIs cannot be a simple matter of c-command: *no* c-commands the NPI in its restriction but not in its scope. Consider also the contrast with *every*.

As Ladusaw points out, the pattern in (8) finds a curious correspondence in the one in (11), which is a schema of the entailment properties of these determiners. The question that we are asking is whether the (a) sentences entail the (b) sentences (downward entailment) or if the (b) sentences entail the (a) sentences (upward entailment): (You have to fix the agreement with *every*.)

- (9) a. [Q women] like dessert wine.  
 b. [Q tall women] like dessert wine
- (10) a. [Q women] like dessert wine.  
 b. [Q women] like Spanish dessert wine.

What we get is this:

(11)		Restriction	Scope
	No	↓	↓
	Some	↑	↑
	Every	↓	↑

We find that whenever an NPI is ok we get at ↓. Ladusaw concludes that NPIs concludes that the defining characteristic property of NPIs is that they are licensed in downward entailing contexts. (This is a widely but not universally accepted view, cf. e.g. work by Giannakidou).

If one represents the meanings of determiners with the help of Venn diagrams it is quite easy to see why we should find the pattern in (11).

For instance, *every A is B* is true when the things that are A constitute a subset of those that are B. If *every A is B* is true, then picking a subset of A will preserve truth. In other words we will get a downward entailment for the restriction. At the same time picking subset for B will not always preserve truth, meaning that the scope is not downward entailing. On the other hand,

picking a superset of B will, showing that the scope is upward entailing. For the other determiners matters work analogously.

Are all the other contexts that license NPIs also downward entailing?

Basically yes, it seems, but there are some interesting wrinkles.

Straightforward case:

- (12) a. She didn't buy a book.  
b. She didn't buy a novel.

Less straightforward case: definite descriptions

- (13) a. Bill didn't bring his children.  
b. Bill didn't bring his daughter.

The inference from (13a) to (13b) does not only require that the context in which (a) is uttered is one where it counts as established that Bill has children (or where that can be easily assumed) (= backgrounded information or 'presupposition' of the definite description *his children*). For the inference to be possible it further has to be the case that we independently know that the backgrounded information/'presupposition' of (b) holds: that Bill has a daughter.

Similar: *doubt*

- (14) a. Phyllis doubts that Tom has been to Vienna.  
b. Phyllis doubts that Tom has been to the Belvedere palace in Vienna.

The downward inference from (a) to (b) only goes through if we can independently assume that Phyllis has some thoughts regarding Tom and the Belvedere palace. We can perhaps consider this the backgrounded information of (b); for 'A doubts that p' to be true seems to entail in a backgrounded way ('presuppose') that A has some propositional attitude to p.

Similar: *only*

- (15) a. Only HELGA built a house.  
b. Only HELGA built a big house.

Again the inference from (a) to (b) goes through if we know independently that the backgrounded information/'presupposition' of (b) holds: that a big house was built.

(For relevant discussion on this matter, couched in the notion of presupposition and 'Strawson Downward entailment' see von Stechow, Kai. 1999. NPI-licensing, Strawson-entailment, and context dependency. *Journal of Semantics* 16: 97-148. On *only* see also Herburger, Elena. 2000. *What counts*. MIT Press and references cited there. Check also Larry Horn's webpage for recent

manuscripts.)

Another tricky case is the licensing of NPIs in the antecedents of conditionals, which also seem not to be downward entailing in the general case, but which really are, as we saw last week.

Other wrinkles we have considered:

-Linebarger's immediate scope constraint

- (16) Mary didn't show every child a picture.  
'Not [Every child x] [Some picture y] Mary showed y to x'  
'Not [Some picture y] [Every child x] Mary showed y to x'
- (17) Mary didn't show every child **any** picture  
\*'Not [Every child x] [Some picture y] Mary showed y to x'  
'Not [Some picture y] [Every child x] Mary showed y to x'

-Cases of derivative licensing (Linebarger)

-Proportional determiners:

*Few* seems to pattern with *no*, as far as NPI licensing is concerned, and *most* with *every*.

- (18) a. Few tourists who have **ever** been to Paris liked it.  
b. Few tourists who have been to Paris bought **any** souvenirs there.
- (19) a. Most tourists who have **ever** been to Paris liked it.  
b. \*Most tourists who have been to Paris bought **any** souvenirs there.

But their entailment properties are not quite what we would expect. For instance, *few* and *most* do not seem to be downward entailing in their restriction:

- (20) a. Few/most women like dessert wine.  
b. Few/most women who like dessert wine like dessert wine.

The downward inferences only seem to go through if the subset case is a representative subset in the sense that there is no skewing when it is picked.